be logical or consistent. By at least the close of the Chou, moreover, and probably many centuries earlier, religious beliefs and practices differed somewhat from state to state. These variations were especially marked in the frontier principalities, such as Ch'in and Ch'u, whose populations and cultures had strong elements not to be found in the older states of the North China plain.

Spirits and gods were superior to men in power, but were not almighty. They were of varying degrees of importance and of extent of jurisdiction. For example, there were many earth gods, each with only a local sphere of power, and there was the Sovereign Earth, with a much wider domain. Very early, perhaps from the beginning, a tendency existed to divide superhuman beings and influences into two groups, those terrestrial and those celestial—those of the earth and those of the air or sky. *Tien* (Heaven) and *Ti* (Earth) formed a pair, and *Shang Ti* (the Supreme Ruler) may have been paralleled by *Hou Tu* (the Soil or Earth).[5] Supreme over both groups was one great being, variously called *Tien* (usually translated Heaven) and *Shang Ti* (probably best translated the Supreme Ruler—although the original meaning of *Ti* is uncertain—and possibly the glorified first ancestor of the ruling house). Originally *Tien* and *Shang Ti* were probably distinct, *Tien* perhaps meaning the heavenly abode, or city of the dead, and *Shang Ti* having more of a personal theistic significance. If we may trust the oracle bones, *Shang Ti* was the term most used under the Shang for the Supreme Being.[4] Under the Chou, *Tien* tended to supplant it—possibly because *Tien* was the god of the ruling house. The Chou *Wang* was regarded as the son of *Tien* and

as reigning by
the mandate of *Tien.* Eventually *Tien* and *Shang Ti* practically
coalesced. *Tien* or *Shang Ti* was sovereign over gods and men.
The cooperation of the spiritual beings was essential to the
welfare of men, including that of groups and of society as a
whole. It was to be secured by the proper performance of ritual
and sacrifices in honor of these beings, and—at least in the later
centuries of the Chou—by right ethical conduct. The ceremonies
were often elaborate, with offerings of food, both grain and flesh,

[3] *Hou Tu* may at different times have been identical with *Ti* (Earth), a female
deity, and *ShB* (ruler of the soil), a male god.

[4] There is a conjecture, however, that the idea of a Supreme Being came in with
the Chou.